

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our Nation's Mississippi River Trail

The Mississippi River Trail (MRT) is a world-class bicycle trail that will follow the Mississippi River all the way from its headwaters in Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico. The trail is partially completed; much of it is still in the planning and development stages. When complete, the MRT will link over 2,000 miles of recreational trails through 10 states, including 280 miles in Iowa.

Designated as a National Millennium Trail, the MRT will preserve precious natural environments along the river, stimulate economic growth in river communities, and provide bicyclists access to a variety of landscapes, history, and culture.

The Iowa Department of Transportation has commissioned the Center for Transportation Research and Education at Iowa State University to develop a plan for a safe, economically beneficial, and scenic MRT route through Iowa.

Benefits of the MRT in Iowa

Safety Benefits

Iowa's Mississippi River Trail will create safe new routes for bicycles and improve safety on existing routes for both bicycles and motor vehicles. The MRT will add bicycle lanes to many roadways and thereby remove cyclists from the same travel path as automobiles and trucks. The additional paved shoulder width required for bicycle lanes has also been shown to reduce motor vehicle crashes.

Economic Benefits

The MRT will also stimulate tourism all along Iowa's eastern border, bringing approximately 20 million additional dollars to the state's economy each year. The trail construction plan is designed to be as cost efficient as possible while maintaining safety as the first priority.

Recreational Benefits

Iowa's MRT will be located as close to the Mississippi River as is practical, never more than 10 miles away, and will provide convenient access to river views, area attractions, and connections to trails in all adjacent states. The MRT will encourage exercise, sightseeing, and appreciation of Iowa's natural, historic, and cultural riches along the Mississippi River.

Iowa's Unique MRT Plan

In Iowa, in-depth analysis has been used to determine the best route for the bike trail and a strategic plan for implementation.

The Route

Iowa's Mississippi River Trail is envisioned to include both off-road bicycle trails and clearly marked bicycle lanes on roadway shoulders.

On-Road Segments

On-road bicycle lanes are generally less costly than off-road bicycle trails. Iowa's MRT will include 255 total miles of bicycle lanes on roadway shoulders, some of which are already existing or planned.

An analysis has determined which roadways along the route are suitable for the addition of bicycle lanes. Eastern Iowa is home to the Great River Road, a National Scenic Byway that follows the Mississippi River from border to border. This and other roadways, with minor improvements, can be made to safely and affordably accommodate bicycles. About 205 miles of paved shoulders will need to be constructed for new MRT bicycle lanes.

All bicycle lanes will be 4 to 6 feet wide and paved with asphalt, which is generally less expensive than concrete. In addition, about two miles of bridges may need to be re-decked in order to accommodate bicycle lanes. The total estimated cost associated with on-road bicycle lanes is \$25.3 million.

Off-Road Segments

Iowa's MRT will incorporate already existing or planned off-road bike trails, including the Heritage Trail in Dubuque, the RiverWay Trails in the Quad-Cities, and many others. Only an additional nine miles of new off-road trails will need to be constructed where roadways were found to be unsuitable for bicycle lanes.

The MRT's off-road bike trails will be 10 feet wide to accommodate both bicyclists and pedestrians. The total estimated cost of paving new bicycle trails with asphalt is \$920,000.

Implementation

Strategic Phases

Iowa's Mississippi River Trail will be constructed, marked with MRT signs, and publicized in phases, with the order generally determined by the segments' capability to be quickly and affordably completed.

Because the first MRT segments will have a great impact on public interest and support, three initial segments have been chosen for their ability to extend existing trails in the shortest time possible.

By completing these segments for which federal funding will be sought, a network of about 40 miles of bicycle facilities will be created in Allamakee, Scott, and Muscatine Counties. These three segments will run directly along the river and have fantastic views.

Cooperative Effort

Within Iowa, the MRT is a cooperative effort of all the cities and counties along the route, area councils of government, municipal and regional planning organizations, local and regional organizations for economic development, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, the Iowa Department of Transportation, MRT, Inc. (the trail's national nonprofit organization), and many other organizations and individuals.

Of the 280 miles of MRT in Iowa, the state of Iowa will be responsible for about 100 miles, counties will be responsible for about 125 miles, and municipalities will be responsible for the remainder, just over 50 miles.

Biking and recreational organizations and area businesses are expected to derive great benefits from the trail system and are invited to contribute to the implementation of the plan.

Total Cost

The total cost of the 280-mile MRT in Iowa is estimated to be between 25 and 32 million dollars, depending on structural accommodations and site characteristics.

Iowa's Mississippi River Trail will be funded through a variety of existing and new local, state, and federal sources.

What to See on the MRT

Throughout history, the Mississippi River has served as an important passageway, carrying native peoples, explorers, fur traders, steamboats, barges, and much more. The river has also made its way into the hearts and imaginations of Americans through its great power and beauty.

According to Mark Twain, the river “has a new story to tell every day.”

Iowa’s portion of the MRT offers the following attractions:

- parks and wildlife areas with breathtaking views of the Mississippi River
- national treasures such as Effigy Mounds National Monument and Keokuk National Cemetery
- locks, dams, ports, and riverboat cruises
- museums and historic neighborhoods such as Snake Alley in Burlington
- art galleries and antique shops
- arboretums and botanical gardens
- casinos, sporting events, and entertainment
- restaurants and lodging